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President: Mr. Kavan ..... (Czech Republic)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 12

Report of the Economic and Social Council (A/57/3 (Parts I and II))

The President: I now give the floor to the President of the Economic and Social Council, His Excellency Mr. Ivan Šimonović, to introduce the report of the Economic and Social Council.

Mr. Šimonović (Croatia): Thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to introduce the 2002 report of the Economic and Social Council.

This year has been a very important year for the Council — one in which it has helped to advance the international development agenda and has undertaken new challenging tasks. I shall briefly highlight some of the key outcomes of the Council's session and then address the issues of conference follow-up, peace-building and conflict prevention as well as cooperation among the Economic and Social Council, the General Assembly and the Security Council.

Let us start with an overview of certain segments of the 2002 session of the Economic and Social Council. The Council's high-level segment was devoted to human resources development, in particular health and education. It gave concrete content to the policies and means required to implement the Millennium Development Goals in those areas. The segment adopted a Ministerial Declaration stressing that health and education are central to sustainable development and poverty eradication and that they should be core concerns of macroeconomic and other policies. The Declaration makes a strong call for the provision of more resources for education and health, in particular for HIV/AIDS and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. It gave new impetus to Governments, the United Nations system and civil society to work towards better health and education for all. A number of ministers of health or education and heads of United Nations system agencies took part in the meeting. A particular feature this year was civil society's extensive participation in the segment and in the preparations for it, notably through the NGO Forum. The Declaration makes a specific reference to the contribution of civil society.

In the debate during the operational activities segment, the main focus was on funding for the development work of the funds and programmes and on harmonizing and simplifying their procedures. The Council focused also on evaluating the effectiveness of the development work of the United Nations system. Many delegations expressed interest in building the segment further as a global forum for providing overall policy guidance for United Nations system operational activities for development. The resolution adopted by the Council mandated key themes to guide and reorient the operational activities of the United Nations system over the short and medium terms.

The Council's coordination segment focused on how to strengthen the Economic and Social Council and the impact and effectiveness of its work. The segment adopted agreed conclusions that create a solid

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foundation for strengthening the Council's contribution to integrated and coordinated follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits. The agreed conclusions also contain a number of important elements that are supportive of the reform agenda currently being developed for the General Assembly.

During the humanitarian affairs segment, the Council provided guidance for reinforcing the coordination of the humanitarian activities of the United Nations system and of other bodies. It also stressed the importance of ensuring a smooth transition from relief to development. The resolution placed a special focus on providing assistance to vulnerable groups.

In its general segment, the Council focused on guiding the work of its subsidiary bodies, on strengthening their functioning and on enhancing the complementarities among them. That Council role is becoming all the more important as we proceed to implement the goals set out at Monterrey, at Johannesburg and at earlier United Nations meetings in a cohesive and effective way. This year, for the first time, a meeting of the Bureau of the Economic and Social Council with the Chairpersons of the functional commissions was organized, followed by a panel discussion with members of the Council. That meeting provided an important forum for coordination and cooperation among the functional commissions as well as with the Economic and Social Council, and it contributed to strengthening the relationship between the Council and its commissions. The Council also looked at the report of its newly established Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. It established a support secretariat for the Forum within the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. That will be important in helping the Council to guide and coordinate the work of the United Nations system and to raise awareness of indigenous issues.

I now turn to follow-up on United Nations conferences and summits. The Council met between the Monterrey Conference and the Johannesburg Summit. Thus, a key concern that ran throughout its session was follow-up on the commitments made at those conferences, at the Millennium Summit and at other conferences and summits. As we move into the phase of implementation of the complex and interrelated goals established at those events, it is essential that the United Nations show that it can provide practical orientation with regard to issues that are of the utmost concern. That is even more important at a time when an uncertain economic situation and a rapid globalization process are posing great challenges. The 2002 session of the Economic and Social Council demonstrated that the Council had the ability to do so.

The Council reaffirmed its commitment to helping the General Assembly to further the goals established at the Millennium Summit and at other major conferences, including those held at Monterrey and Johannesburg. In many ways, its work helped to advance the practical follow-up on those commitments. The promotion of integrated responses to major United Nations conferences and summits is an area where the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council should be working closely together. The Council has pursued consistent efforts to promote integrated follow-up of conferences and to identify how best to conduct conference reviews. In 2002, it stressed the importance of fully using existing United Nations bodies for conference reviews. Many delegations in the General Assembly have supported the establishment of an open-ended ad hoc working group, under the auspices of the President of the General Assembly, to address the issue in a comprehensive manner, also taking into account the ongoing discussion of the overall reform process.

Policy guidance from the Assembly will assist the Council in its task of promoting coherence in the implementation of conference goals, which is an important means of achieving the Millennium Development Goals. In particular, the Council carries out that task by addressing cross-cutting conference themes and by guiding the work of its commissions and of the United Nations system on conference follow-up. It thus contributes to the development of a holistic and comprehensive approach in the development agenda emerging from recent conferences.

The Council's July session adopted a resolution on the follow-up to the Monterrey Conference. That resolution places particular emphasis on the Council's role in ensuring coherent implementation of the Monterrey Consensus by United Nations economic and social entities and by the system as a whole. The Council is determined to effectively carry out the central role assigned to it in the Monterrey follow-up process. It is currently reflecting on how best to discharge that mandate through its joint meetings with the Bretton Woods institutions.

At this year's spring high-level meeting, the Council reflected on how this could be done. For the first time, the World Trade Organization was actively engaged in that meeting, together with the Bretton Woods institutions and other stakeholders of the Monterrey process. For next year, we are currently thinking of extending the meeting to a full day. Forums with non-governmental organizations and the private sector could be held prior to the meeting.

Peace-building and conflict prevention is another area where we need to mobilize our efforts to achieve the Goals of the Millennium Declaration. In response to a request by the General Assembly, the Council agreed to establish, during its 2002 substantive session, an Ad Hoc Advisory Group on African Countries Emerging from Conflict. The Group will aim to examine humanitarian and economic needs; to review relevant programmes of support; to prepare recommendations for a long-term programme of support that integrates relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and development in a comprehensive approach; and to provide advice on ensuring the adequacy and coherence of international assistance. This is a concrete step taken by the Council to strengthen its contribution to an integrated approach to peace-building and development.

Guinea-Bissau was the first country to request that such an advisory group be formed. I would like to stress that the criteria for the composition of the Group were not based on regional representation but on the need to have a small and efficient representation of countries that can contribute the most to addressing the situation in Guinea-Bissau. On 25 October 2002, the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Guinea-Bissau was established by the Economic and Social Council. It has already visited Guinea-Bissau, and it will submit to the Council a report on its recommendations by mid-January 2003. In performing its task, the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Guinea-Bissau will closely cooperate with the Security Council's Ad Hoc Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa.

The year 2002 was indeed marked by increased interaction between the Economic and Social Council and the Security Council. I addressed the Security Council four times. Most recently, in October, I had the opportunity to speak at the public meeting of the Security Council on cooperation between the United Nations system and the Central African region and at its public meeting on women, peace and security. As well, the President of the Security Council addressed the Economic and Social Council, for example, on the recent commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the signing of the General Peace Agreement in Mozambique. We intend to continue that interactive exchange in the future, as we are increasingly aware of the close linkages among peace, security — including terrorism — and issues of economic and social development.

With respect to cooperation between the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, in addition to conference follow-up and the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on African Countries Emerging from Conflict, many other outcomes of the Council are of key relevance to the work of the General Assembly, such as those on human rights, social development and gender mainstreaming, to mention only a few.

A more substantive and interactive relationship is developing between the Assembly and the Council. That relationship should help in providing practical orientation to the international community in the follow-up to the Millennium Summit, the Monterrey Conference and the Johannesburg Summit. In that regard, it will be important to maximize synergies between the Economic and Social Council and the Second Committee.

The process of reforming the Economic and Social Council, in follow-up to the coordination segment of this year's session, is continuing under the leadership of the Bureau. The work of the Council could still be made more efficient. One important condition in that regard is that a decision be taken as early as possible on the themes for the Council's high-level and coordination segments to allow sufficient time for their preparation, including the organization of round tables and panels. Another area in which the Council needs to further improve its work is its relationship with the Bretton Woods institutions. This is crucial for the Bretton Woods institutions, as well as for the Council, as a more efficient relationship among them can be the basis for broader-based and more inclusive global economic decision-making.

Still, we should recognize that the Council has improved its work tremendously in recent years. It is certainly not — if it ever was — a ceremonial body. It is a body that is active throughout the year through its round tables, panel discussions and the recently

established Ad Hoc Advisory Group on African Countries Emerging from Conflict.

The substantive session of the Economic and Social Council showed us that it is possible, given the political will of its membership, to strengthen the Council's role and the efficiency of its work. During the current session of the General Assembly, there is a sense of expectation that overall work on strengthening the Organization will receive new energy and impetus. The Economic and Social Council, for its part, will be actively supporting that process within its area of competence.

Mr. Saleh (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): Let me first thank Ambassador Šimonović, President of the Economic and Social Council, for his thorough presentation of the Council's report (A/57/3). I would also like to thank Ambassador Šimonović for his reform efforts during his presidency of the Council over the past year.

The Economic and Social Council is of crucial importance, because it is one of the principal organs of the United Nations. It is a central intergovernmental body tasked under Article 62 of the Charter with ensuring coordination within the United Nations system and with presenting studies and recommendations on economic, social, cultural, educational and health issues. Given the importance of those issues and the important role the Council has assumed in recent years, there is a more pressing need to reform and reinvigorate the Council. While some progress has been made, much remains to be done. Reform is necessary, if the Council is to take up economic and social questions at the international level in a serious fashion. However, efforts are being made to strengthen the Council to make it more effective in dealing with the questions within its competence.

In that context, I shall mention some developments over the past year that have strengthened the Council's role. First, during the substantive session of 2002, the Bureau of the Economic and Social Council held a joint meeting with the bureaux of the functional commissions reporting to the Council. The goal was, for the first time, to strengthen coordination among the functional commission, which deal with distinct but interrelated questions. That led to a meeting between the chairpersons of the functional commissions and members of the Council, similar to the annual meeting with the heads of the regional economic commissions during the substantive session. These meetings help strengthen coordination between the various technical committees of the Economic and Social Council in order to avoid duplication. Secondly, during the present General Assembly session there have been a number of joint meetings held between the First and Second Committees to strengthen coordination between them and the Economic and Social Council, and to prevent duplication. Both Committees serve as liaison between the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. Thirdly, during the second week of July 2002 there was a coordination meeting, the first of its kind between the presiding officers of the major United Nations bodies: the Economic and Social Council, the Security Council and the General Assembly.

We concur with the idea of this type of meetings that can only strengthen the effectiveness of the major United Nations bodies and provide for better coordination of their actions in accordance with the Millennium Declaration and the report of the Secretary-General entitled, "An agenda for further change".

Fourthly, cooperation and coordination between the Economic and Social Council and the Security Council has become stronger than before. In fact, the President of the Economic and Social Council, upon the invitation of the President of the Security Council, participated in the public meeting on Africa held by the Security Council on 29 January 2002 under the Mauritian presidency. It was the first time that the President of the Economic and Social Council officially attended a meeting of the Security Council. It paved the way for other meetings of this type.

At the request of the President of the Security Council, on 22 May 2002, the President of the Economic and Social Council participated in the Ad hoc Working Group on Africa of the Security Council. The President of the Security Council also participated in the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council in 2002 at the invitation of the President of ECOSOC. This cooperative linkage between the two Councils is similar to the inextricable linkage between peace and development. They complement each other.

Fifthly, the 2002 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council witnessed the establishment of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on African countries emerging from conflict. This is a true

achievement of the Council. Such an advisory group will strengthen the role of the Council in post-conflict peace-building. It will lead to rehabilitation and reconstruction and prevent any resumption of hostilities. This Advisory Group will strengthen cooperation and coordination between the Economic and Social Council and the Security Council. Any observer of the Economic and Social Council activities will necessarily note the cooperation between the members, the Secretariat and interested third parties for reforming the Council and its working methods and for increasing its efficiency. In his report entitled "Strengthening the Economic and Social Council", the Secretary-General stressed this requirement and mentioned the role of the Council in coordinating the implementation of the recommendations of international conferences and the Millennium Declaration in cooperation and coordination with the Bretton Woods institutions and the United Nations system. This is in addition to the challenges facing the Council at the present time, such as globalization, which necessitates the development of policies and the adoption of resolutions to find more integrated approaches for achieving peace and development.

The Council, over the past two years, has given a great deal of attention to human development, particularly in Africa, through the convening of high-level meetings of the Council to discuss this issue. This is encouraging because this continent deserves great attention from the United Nations to help it overcome its burdensome crises.

Finally, we hope that the role of the Economic and Social Council will be strengthened in the future so that it can better tackle the challenges of our times and the ever-changing international developments. For this, it will be necessary to join our efforts to strengthen the activities of this important body and its various committees. This is why there must be more cooperation between members of the Council, the Presidency of the Council, the Secretariat, the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization. This is in addition to the private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which will help the Council to fulfil its mandate in the best possible manner.

Ms. Løj (Denmark): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the associated countries — Cyprus, Malta and Turkey, as well as the European Free Trade Area country of the European Economic Area, Iceland, align themselves with this statement.

The European Union continues to attach great importance to the revitalization of the Economic and Social Council. In this respect we find that this summer's substantive session yielded some productive discussions. The Council must, however, continue to revitalize itself in order to maintain its relevance and become increasingly meaningful.

The accomplishments of the substantive session included the ministerial debate and the declaration on human resources development. The European Union finds that the session resulted in relevant concrete proposals for policies and steps required to meet the Millennium Development Goals in the areas of health and education. We support the Council in its endeavours to build on the recent achievements of this summer's substantive session in order to increase its relevance and effectiveness. In doing so, we support a reinforced role for the Council in promoting an integrated and coordinated follow-up to the outcomes of major United Nations conferences and summits. We urge the Council to continue to strengthen its collaboration with the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization as indicated in the Monterrey Consensus. We look forward to finalizing concrete proposals to enhance the operational usefulness of the annual high-level dialogue between the institutions.

We attach importance to the Council's role in coordinating its subsidiary bodies and its complementary role with the General Assembly. We welcome the decisions to strengthen the effectiveness of the Council's work by agreeing on a number of concrete steps to streamline working methods and alleviate documentation problems.

The European Union is very pleased with the establishment of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on African countries emerging from conflict. We sincerely hope that this mechanism will contribute toward filling the gap between relief efforts and long-term reconstruction and development.

Furthermore, we hope that the mechanism will provide an opportunity to enhance the coordination between the Economic and Social Council and the

Security Council in order to address the challenges of peace-building and to mobilize support for the needs of the African countries emerging from conflict.

The European Union welcomes the resolution on the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations adopted at the humanitarian segment of the Economic and Social Council. The resolution gives clear guidance to all actors in the humanitarian field. In this regard, the EU welcomes the fact that increased attention to vulnerable groups was called for.

The support of the European Union for the work of the Economic and Social Council is well known. We must take advantage of this window of opportunity — the momentum for action and improvement created by the Millennium Summit, the Monterrey Conference and the Johannesburg Summit. What it will take is the political will and resolve to do so. It is our responsibility to ensure that the Economic and Social Council finally fulfils its potential in the economic and social field, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. We look forward to the implementation of the next steps in this respect.

Mr. Belinga-Eboutou (Cameroon) (*spoke in French*): A year ago, the General Assembly took a historic decision: to consider in plenary the report of the Economic and Social Council. The General Assembly's intention was to strengthen the role of that organ, as called for in the Millennium Declaration, and to restore to international cooperation its full political dimension and its ability to contribute to the maintenance of peace. My country, Cameroon, had the honour of presiding over the Economic and Social Council at the time.

The presentation just made by the President of the Economic and Social Council, my colleague Ambassador Šimonović, shows how very insightful the General Assembly was at the time. I wish to pay tribute to the Assembly for its dynamism, its clarity of vision and for pursuing its quest for a spirit of consensus, a quality with which we all are familiar.

My delegation listened to that presentation with the greatest interest. It covered the work done by the Economic and Social Council in the past year, as well as, most importantly, directions to be taken in future. We are convinced that the recommendations of the President of the Council, as well as the extremely useful suggestions that he was kind enough to offer us, will find a place in future resolutions adopted in the context of a detailed consideration of the report of the Economic and Social Council.

The year 2002 was a milestone for the Economic and Social Council, as its President has just noted. In Monterrey and later in Johannesburg, our heads of State recognized the importance of that organ in the process of the mobilization of Governments, civil society and international organizations, within a renewed spirit of partnership for development and in particular for a more equitable and humane globalization.

An important role was granted to the Economic and Social Council in the follow-up to the conferences — a well-deserved tribute for its work to date. But this is first and foremost a challenge that all of us together, as Members of the United Nations, must face. The work of the Council this year shows that we are moving in the right direction, and the excellent presentation made earlier by the President of the Council is particularly meaningful in this regard.

The Ministerial declaration on health and education gives a direct impetus to efforts to achieve the Millennium Declaration goals and those of the other important summits. While calling for new initiatives and new partnerships, the declaration issues an urgent appeal for the mobilization of new resources for health and education.

The Economic and Social Council has also asserted its resolve to follow up on the Monterrey Conference. It has issued clear guidelines for preparations for its spring meeting with the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Bretton Woods institutions. We invite the Economic and Social Council to initiate as soon as possible preparations for this extremely important meeting. We must together consider how this upcoming meeting can contribute to the implementation of the Monterrey objectives.

Let us engage our Bretton Woods partners while leaving the doors open to civil society. In this vein, we must reflect on what the Economic and Social Council can contribute to the success of the annual high-level debate in the General Assembly, in particular the one to be held next year on following up the Monterrey Summit.

The Economic and Social Council has also confirmed its capacity to mobilize United Nations

funds and programmes on the basis of clear-cut priorities. The participation of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and of other regional organizations in operational activities augurs well for the Council's ability to strengthen international cooperation in the field of development.

The Economic and Social Council has clearly shown what an important part it can play in the debate on international development; However, this is not enough. The Council must adapt its methods of work to the challenges posed by the so-called new multilateralism, which was emphasized during the Millennium Summit and reaffirmed recently at Monterrey, Doha and Johannesburg.

Finally, allow me to say a few words about the development of Africa. This question has been at the core of the concerns of the Economic and Social Council for some years, for which we are grateful. In 2001, under the presidency of Cameroon, the Council was the first international body clearly to state its support for the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which had just been launched in Lusaka.

With the creation this year of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on African Countries Emerging from Conflicts, the Economic and Social Council has taken an important step to strengthen international cooperation precisely where it is most needed. Cameroon welcomes the creation of the first Ad Hoc Advisory Group, on Guinea-Bissau, and we await its report with great interest. Despite — indeed, because of — the difficult political situation in that country, we must do everything we can to help the people of Guinea-Bissau to find the way to peace and sustainable development once again.

Cameroon also welcomes the enhanced interaction between the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council. In October 2002, the President of the Economic and Social Council was invited to attend two important Security Council meetings — the public meeting on women and peace and security and the meeting on strengthening the United Nations system with regard to conflict prevention and resolution in Central Africa. The dialogue that was thus initiated between the two Councils will improve the efficiency of United Nations action in favour of peace and development.

As I said at the beginning of my statement, one year ago Cameroon was presiding over the Economic and Social Council, and it was at our initiative that that Council's report came to be examined by the General Assembly in plenary meeting, and not only in the Second Committee. As we said earlier, this is not merely a procedural matter. It also provides a mechanism to enable the General Assembly to consider every aspect of the work of the Economic and Social Council and to draw on its views in forging economic and social policy and in formulating the development activities of the United Nations system.

We are pleased to note that today's debate has given us an opportunity to reflect in depth on the work of the Economic and Social Council and to develop new orientations with a view to enabling that organ to be what it must be: an indispensable element for the protection of international peace and security.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on agenda item 12. The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 12.

Before adjourning the meeting, I would like to remind members that, as was announced in today's Journal, the 5th meeting of the open-ended informal consultations of the plenary on United Nations reform will begin immediately upon the adjournment of this meeting, in the Trusteeship Council Chamber.

The meeting rose at 10.55 a.m.